I thought I saw your face today (and I just turned my head away)
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I thought I saw your face today (and I just turned my head away)

by Anonymous

Summary

Todds life without Neil

or

snippets of Todd seeing Neil in everything

Title from "I Thought I Saw Your Face Today" by She & Him

Notes

Heyyy, this is posted anonymously but just know this is something I wrote instead of the last chapter of my other fic lmao. I was listening to the song (I Thought I Saw Your Face Today by She & Him) and just had to write something with it. Idk if this will be any good but hope you enjoy yallllll

See the end of the work for more notes

When Todd published his first book, he struggled with many of the sections, wanting them to be perfect. Mainly, the dedication.

It pained him a little; how could he not instantly know who and how to dedicate his first book?

When he got married, while kissing his wife, he had a thought. "*You are worthy of dedication.*" This simple thought has occurred to him a few more times, most notably when each of his children were born. To him as an author and poet, to have something dedicated to you was the height of his love.

Despite this, it hadn't felt right to dedicate his first published book to his family. He still would, of course, but not for this one. Maybe it was wrong of him, but they all understood.

When he told his wife about his struggles, she didn't question why it wasn't her or their children, only asking why he was having a hard time. He wasn't sure how to say that nothing he tried felt right, so he simply shrugged. For the first time since his time at Welton Academy, Todd couldn't rack his brain for the words to make sense of his thoughts.

His wife, not knowing how to help, could only propose he really sit down and think about it. So Todd did just that. With his typewriter in front of him, he dedicated his night to finishing his first publication.

Despite everything, Todd sat at his desk for 4 hours that day. The answer to all his problems seemed to be right on his tongue; he could reach out and grasp it but still couldn't quite make out what it was.

With a sigh, he resigned and lost hope for the day, quickly leaving his

office to help his wife with dinner. It was at this point, midway down the stairs, that he noticed an old photo he left hanging up. A photo from his school days. His dead poet days.

A photo of the 1959 dead poets hung slightly askew on the walls. It should have been obvious looking back; who was always going to be his dedication.

In the end, Todd's dedication read as follows.

“To Neil,

You once told me that being *in* means I had to do something, not just say I’m in.

So this is me doing something.”

It was one of the first things Todd noticed about Neil.

His smile was something so beautiful, Todd wasn't quite sure how people could turn their heads away. Despite his best efforts, Todd could often be found staring at Neil and his smile. He never quite knew how to describe it in a way most would understand, but it left Todd breathless. How had this boy and his beauteous smile accepted him as a part of the group? As one of their friends?

His smile was similar to that of a fairy, mischievous and so beautiful. It was a bit sad thinking back on Neil's role as Robin Goodfellow now, but it was truly his best role, Todd would say, for even the smile

alone. In good conscience, however, Todd would never say this aloud because no one would understand what he meant by this.

It happened once later in Todd's life, when his oldest daughter brought him to a new up-and-coming diner. It was a simple place, but the appeal was there, the staff was friendly, and the food cheap.

Halfway through their meal, a server who had not been theirs approached with a pot of fresh-seeming coffee. Not looking away from his daughter as she told him a story about what happened on her film set earlier, Todd moved his mug to get refilled. Realizing how rude he may have seemed, Todd glanced over at the new server to thank him when he noticed what was almost a ghost in front of him.

This new server had a smile that was so painstakingly familiar his heart ached. It was a winsome smile, one that was reassuring, a tad mischievous, and impossibly alive.

Yet as soon as he noticed it, the smile's familiarity faded. It wasn't quite Neil's, and it never really would be.

“Was there something I could help you with, sir?” The server noticed Todd staring.

This was not Neil nor his smile, and it was so bitterly obvious in that moment. Todd turned his head.

When Todd's son was in high school, he joined the local theater club. Happy for his son, Todd promised to always go to his son's

productions.

Later, when his son handed him the flyer for their winter play, Todd regretted the promise he made his son. It left a guilty feeling in his chest, considering his own adolescence, but his son's winter play happened to be William Shakespeare's A Midsummer Night's Dream.

Todd appreciated Shakespeare, of course, but the thought of going to see the play left a sour taste in his mouth. Yet being a better father than his father ever had been, he sucked it up and went to support his child. He was just lucky his son was cast as Bottom rather than Puck.

The family finally shuffled their way into the high school auditorium after being complimented on his son's ability by nearly every adult helping with the production. Todd hardly even noticed when his oldest daughter grabbed his hand as she guided him to his seat, as he was too busy keeping track of his breath.

The performance was excellent, great even. The teachers weren't wrong when they said his son had a gift.

Still, Todd couldn't help but drift off occasionally. This play would never be the same for him, and not many knew that.

When the play is over and the actors are mingling and talking with friends and family, Todd's eyes catch something in the distance. A boy accepting flowers from his family or friends. Todd could only see the back of this young actor, but he knew this scene.

It was familiar: a young boy with achingly recognizable hair, hair Todd had once known. This display was one Todd never actually got to see the end of.

Yet as soon as it started, Todd was broken out of his awkward staring as he turned towards his son. He had finally made his way to the group, practically bouncing as he walked up.

“Dad! How was I?”

For the first time since he learned about the play, Todd had a genuine smile as he responded.

“You were good. You were really good.”

When Todd had become a well-known author and poet, he used a lot of his newfound money on a nice house with a lake basically in the backyard. Having a lake nearby had been a little dream of his for a long time.

When it was cold, he could simply sit outside by the lake dock and admire the view. Occasionally, when it was really cold, his breath visible and nose red, Todd would sit for longer and think.

Lakes had always made him think about Neil.

Once, he had helped Neil run lines at the lake by Welton.

Later, he had mourned Neil by that same lake, surrounded by all of

their friends.

There would never be another time like that; nothing could ever compare to then. Eventually, after some time, lakes had become less for the grief and more for the memories of before. He had accepted this, but it still hurt every so often.

Sometimes, when he's been sitting at the lakeside for hours, he will swear that he can feel Neil right behind him. Waiting for his next line.

When his children were little. Todd often took them to a nearby field to run around and play in. It was a quiet place that helped them get rid of their excess energy.

It was one of those cold autumn days, where he sat on an old rickety wooden bench keeping an eye on his children, that he heard it.

The winds picked up just ever so, with leaves jumping around everywhere around them and the taller grass swaying.

For a moment, there was laughter joining that of his children. Bright and impossible. A laugh that started in the face and smile.

Mischievous, like a stolen notebook, and running around the room.

His youngest, still learning to walk and sitting in his lap, giggled and

swatted her hands around as if playing with the wind.

Yet as soon as it started, it was over. Leaving the laughter echoing in his now ringing ears.

End Notes

Notes on each section-
*I hope the reference to “but being in means you have to do something. Not just say you're in.” was a little obvious

*in more modern tellings puck is often charming and handsome, while in others like mythology he can be more ugly (subjective but yk what I'm saying) and impish, so I went with a more modern approach
I am definitely basing Todd on Ethan Hawke, which means the oldest daughter is Maya lol

*of course Todd's son would be an actor , and the play was mainly for angst
Todd never knew one of the last things Neil said was “i was good, i was really good” so to him, he is just quoting his friend charlie (even tho he kinda is referencing Neil)

*I hope the memories are on full display, Todd is kinda constantly struggling.

*Maybe Neil was playing with his kids, cause he could definitely be a puck-like spirit

Hopefully this wasnt too bad but either way comments (fuel me) + feedback and kudos are much appreciated !!!!

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